

Trail of the Serpent (Serpent's Trail)
.4 miles from East Entrance
Colorado National Monument
Grand Junction vicinity
Mesa County
Colorado

HAER No. CO-28

HAER
COLO
39-GRAND J.
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
National Park Service
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

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(Serpent's Trail)

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- Location: The trail begins about .4 mile from the eastern entrance to Colorado National Monument and climbs 1.6 miles in the area of No Thoroughfare Canyon, southwest of the city of Grand Junction, Mesa County, Colorado.
- Significance: Completed in 1921, Serpent's Trail was the only automobile access to Colorado National Monument until 1937, and continued to be the only access from the Grand Junction end of the monument until 1950. The early automobile road represents an important era of automobile tourism, when the National Park Service made a concerted effort to provide access to vehicles. The Serpent's Trail also is an example of the engineering techniques used in early road construction in challenging terrain. Such techniques include using numerous switchbacks to gain elevation, building simple wooden culverts, constructing dry-laid retaining walls, limiting the width of the road and not paving.
- History: Though the construction of the road was started in 1912 by a toll road company under the direction of Colorado National Monument Custodian John Otto, the project soon languished. Grand County began work on the road in January 1921 and finished construction later that year.
- Description: Although the upper portion of the original road was obliterated during construction of the Rim Rock Drive in 1939-40, the remaining portion retains a high degree of integrity. Currently a hiking trail, the path still exhibits features of the early road construction, such as dry-laid masonry retaining walls, rubble fill and nineteen switchbacks. The unpaved, two-lane, two-way road was originally 19 feet wide, though today it is maintained as an 11-foot wide trail. The trail ascends 790 feet up the side of No Thoroughfare Canyon, providing scenic vistas of the canyon, sandstone ledges, Grand Valley, the Book Cliffs and other natural features.
- Source: "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Serpent's Trail." Draft. R. Laurie Simmons and Thomas H. Simmons, Front Range Research Associates, 1990. On file at the Rocky Mountain Regional Office, National Park Service.